



Kenneth Belcher, Connie Goode
Virginia Tech at Blacksburg, VA

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0:00:00

Danille Christensen: Right, so it's November 18, 2022. I'm Danille Christensen, and I'm here on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, with Connie Goode and Kenneth Belcher. And we are going to be talking today about their involvement in a community apple pie making venture in Woolwine, Virginia. So would you mind introducing yourself for the tape? Just tell us who you are, a little bit of, about your background.

0:00:43

Kenneth Belcher: So my name is Ken Belcher, or Kenneth Belcher as I'm known back home. I basically was born in December 11th of 1968. I was born in Stuart, Virginia, at the RJ Reynolds Memorial Hospital, a small little place, it looks like a clinic in any other place. And I've lived in Woolwine up until I moved to Blacksburg to come here to Virginia Tech. So, I went to Patrick County High School, and I loved being at home and I love going back home now. So, you know, everybody asks me where I'm from, I'm like, "About twenty-three miles that way, but it takes an hour and fifteen minutes to get there." So that's me. And currently, I serve as Director of Facilities and Operations here at Virginia Tech, overseeing dorms and dining.

Connie Goode: Connie Goode. I was born in September of 1992...

KB: Ah—'72.

CG: '72. Oh, lordy. I told you this is gonna be bad. (laughter)

DC: You can start that over again.

CG: All right, we'll start that one over. Hey, I'm Connie Goode. I was born in September of 1972 in Patrick County, born in Stuart, Virginia, at RJ Reynolds Memorial Hospital, which is now

closed—one of our bad things that has happened in the county [00:02:00] within the last few years. I currently work at Hanes Brands Incorporated. I am a volunteer firefighter and EMT, I'm also the captain of the Smith River Rescue Squad, and the Ladies Auxiliary president/vice president for the Woolwine Volunteer Fire Department. Which is—

DC: So you've got lots of extra time.

CG: Yeah, lots of extra time. Plus being a grandma, which I absolutely love. Um, I've always lived and stayed in Woolwine, born and raised on Route 40, a curvy road, but I *love* it.

Everybody's like, "Don't you want to leave Patrick County?" I was like, "No. I'm happy where I'm at." Found my husband. My husband's been, well, born and raised in Woolwine, Virginia, also. So we're happy where we're at.

DC: And what do you do with Hanes?

CG: I actually work in the accounting office. I'm a Special Operations accountant. Too, I do the inventory, the cost accounting, some payroll, [00:03:00] some IT, some health nursing, and stuff like that. I do the hearing conservation, the vision test, the CPR trainings—anything that they say, "Hey, can you do?" I'll do my best to do it.

DC: And you're siblings?

KB: Yes.

CG: Yes.

DC: So tell us a little bit about your family. What did your parents do, what it was like growing up in Woolwine?

KB: Okay, so Dad [Herman (Everett) Belcher] was a logger, worked in logging, pulling trees out of the mountains, and basically also worked at a sawmill part time, also drove a log truck. So basically, he's done that since—probably when he completed sixth grade? and probably a little bit before that, as well.

DC: About when would that be?

KB: So he was born in 1944, and so, probably [calculates:] seven, six plus [00:04:00] four—maybe twelve years old? Twelve or fourteen, probably was working at least part time with that with the family.

CG: Yeah, uh, Grandpa, and um, his brothers and stuff had done logging their whole life. So when he was old enough to *go*, he went with *them*.

DC: And what are their names? Your grandfather and your dad?

KB: Dad is Herman Everett Belcher. And I'm Kenneth Everett Belcher. And Grandpa is Waller Everett Belcher. Um, so this is the first generation without a—Carter doesn't have the middle name Everett, which disturbs me a little bit. [CG laughs] But no. So they were *loggers*. I mean, I'm the first generation in I don't know how long, that doesn't cut down trees. And I just got a chainsaw for *myself* a couple of years ago. [Laughs] So, um—

CG: Daddy knew that was a dangerous occupation. So for a long time, it was not *allowed*. I mean, it was, [00:05:00] you know, it was [he said], "No, I got it. I'll do it. I got it." And now, since Daddy's gotten older, he's not able to do as much. So it's more of, "Well, now you crank the chainsaw, and I'll still saw." But with firefighting, I actually got to take a class. So I actually was able to use a chainsaw and Dad let me use it *one* time. And he's like, "Yeah, no, you don't

need to do that." And I'm like, "But Dad, I'm trained now." And he's like, "Yeah, no." So he don't let me still play with the chainsaw.

KB: Yeah, so it *is* impressive if he gets tired, and I'm actually able to pick up the chainsaw and cut a little bit before he comes back and grabs the chainsaw.

CG: But he did work in a factory. He did work, at that time, it was JP Stevens, which is where I'm working at now, but it's Hanes now. He actually worked there for—not quite a year, it might have been like six months. And he was like, "Yeah, not for me. I want back outside." So that's the only *inside* job that he ever had.

KB: He worked for a mirror factory [Virginia Mirror] when I was *really* little. And he basically blames all the bad luck on the number of mirrors [00:06:00] he probably broke at that place. [laughter] It was down in Henry County. So, but Mom worked the entirety. Her name is Carolyn Nolen Belcher. So she's from the Nolen side, all from Shooting Creek area of the county. And she was born and raised—she was born in Floyd, but raised really in Patrick County. And so she worked at the elastic plant, which has had several names. It's over in Stuart. And so they make narrow fabric. It's been there—

CG: Narrow *elastic*,

KB: Narrow elastic

CG: like the underwear in the elastic or—

KB: So I went with her on her first day of work, at the plant because she was pregnant and didn't know it. [Smiles] So she worked there for fifty years. Fifty plus—

CG: Fifty-two, I think.

KB: Fifty-two. So you know—and really stayed *with* that, because it provided health insurance. [00:07:00] The pay was not great—our students [at Virginia Tech] get paid, I think, about five dollars more an hour now than she was making after working at the factory for that long. But she had health insurance. And somehow, with logging and doing that sort of thing, they were able to raise two kids. We didn't have everything we *wanted*, but we had everything we needed? And as I looked back at shows now that show, you know, “The Toys that Made the [19]70s!” or whatever I'm like, "I had a good number of those!"

CG: Fisher Price Little People, loved them.

KB: [laughing] You know, we didn't have everything. I had one [*Star Wars*] Stormtrooper that stood in for the entirety of the entire Galactic Empire. And so, [laughing] I had *one* Stormtrooper, and I thought, well, my friends had *four*. And I was like, you know, "He's rich." But you know, it was a good place to grow up. And the education system there, we had teachers that taught Mom and Dad—taught *us*? And the quality of the education, [00:08:00] coming to Virginia Tech, I felt very comfortable in my knowledge. I didn't feel that coming from a small town, a small county, put me at the disadvantage that I think we may have seen further southwest in Virginia—because the people cared. And so, I can't, I don't know that the education system is still at the same place? I know [during the COVID-19 pandemic] I watched some of the videos that my nieces were [learning from], and then I had to ask them, and Connie's like: "Do *not* call the school board." [laughing] And I'm like, "But they're *wrong*." And so that's—

CG: COVID was a big eye opener as far as what or how they taught, you know, different from what *we* was taught. So it was kind of interesting, some of the videos I would watch because my youngest was like, "I don't understand." So I was like, "Okay," so I would watch it. And I'm like, "Okay, YouTube [00:09:00] it is," because I couldn't follow it.

DC: For things like math?

CG: Yeah.

KB: A lot of things. And then they'd call me. [laughs]

CG: Yeah, then it was him. "All right, take this to Uncle Ken, get him on here," because you know, I do what I *can*, but I've got resources. I'm going to use them.

DC: Well, I was lucky enough to be at the apple pie making for a short while on the sixth, I think it was, of October? And I was able to meet—there were a couple of teachers who were there, right?

CG: Ms. Perry, which was my kindergarten and fourth-grade teacher. So I actually had her twice in elementary school. And, you know, like I said, I still love her. I mean, she knows you, she knows my kids. She's actually subbed for both of my kids when they was going through school. And Ms. Harmon, which was the home ec teacher, she was not able to be there [on October 6]. She's usually there with us. [00:10:00] The past two years she has not been able to help with doing the pies. But it's so funny because she'll sit there and she'll still call me my mom. She's like, "Hey, Carolyn," and I'm like, "Not me."

DC: She taught you both?

CG: Yeah, because she taught us both. And so, it's *great* to see her and she's always just like, "No, my name is Claudine." I was like, "No, you will always be Ms. Harmon." That's my—you know. So it's great to have that knowledge of the past history of the family and stuff.

DC: Yeah, I noticed that there were—a lot of intergenerational kind of work that was happening there in the room, as well. Did you also study at Virginia Tech? Or where did you get your accounting training?

CG: Well, actually, it's one of those “hard knock life” deals? Most of what I have learned, I've learned on my own. I did go to Patrick Henry [now Patrick & Henry] Community College for probably about two years, General Studies? I *did* not graduate. I actually went for nursing. And that's when AIDS started really getting out [00:11:00] and really, you know, it was the scare tactic at that time going, “Oh my God, if you get breathed on, you're gonna get AIDS” and everything else. And I was young, *did* not know, because the knowledge wasn't there yet. So I was wanting to have a family. I was wanting to get married and have a family and I didn't want to have to come in one day and go, “Hey, you can't touch me.” I don't *know*? —Because like I said, at that time, it was that fear that they used to put *in* you to where “you can't drink from a water fountain.” So that kind of scared me away from that. And where I was working at, at the time, which was Virginia Narrow Fabrics, right across from where I'm working at now, I was working at part time after school. They had an opening in the office that I was doing anyway, so they just let me kind of slide on in. So everything I've done, I've kinda just learnt on the job.

DC: It sounds like your interest in nursing and those kinds of skills have come back in another way through EMT [00:12:00] work, too, right?

CG: Yeah. So one of these years, maybe possibly, in the future, sometime I might go get my MA or my LPN or something like that. Maybe, possibly? If not—I did work at ER, I worked at, well, it was [originally] RJ Reynolds, but that time, it was Pioneer [Community Hospital]. I worked there, when they closed down, just as—that was my *fun* job, you know, I didn't have to have it, but it was extra spending money. And I got to work in the ER as a tech. So I was able to do you

know, the IVs and do my skills, I don't get to use too much in the back of the truck. So that kind of put the flame in there a little bit more. So—

DC: As you were listing off all your skills at the beginning of our conversation, I was just—they were too quick to write down, you know? [CG laughs] but I was just so impressed, the kind of the range of things you can do, *including* your ability to organize big groups of people and big events. And so—

CG: [00:13:00] That goes back to my family.

DC: Tell me about that.

CG: Yeah, our family is *awesome*. Now, there was times, I always said, when me and Kenneth was growing up, I could beat him to death. We did chase each other. We *did* fight. But we loved each other. And we still do.

DC: And how far apart are you in age?

CG: Four—

KB: Three years, eight months.

CG: Yeah. Close enough to four. [laughs]

DC: In school probably, yeah.

CG: Yeah, so I mean, but we was good. We was even—when we was you know, he was old enough and he was driving. It wasn't, "No, you can't go with me." It was like, "Hey, you want a ride, you want to go?" So it was really good. I was able to go in there and steal his T-shirts from his closets. I loved it when he came home. Did we fight? Yes. We still fought. But he always had my back. And we complement each other *so* well. Our *mom* is tremendous. She's great at

everything. I mean, she's pretty much the reason [00:14:00] why I can do what all now I can do, because she's there. If I need her she's there, with the kids she's there. If they need to go to dance, she's there. And with all of that we was able to, I guess, support? organize each other. You know, if—we've got a wedding coming up December third, my oldest is getting married, we're catering it. We are doing all the decorations. We are doing I mean, we've done all the planning, all the—and it's because I know if I get to a point I can go, "Hey, you know, I've got this going on," and he's right there going, "Okay, well, we can do this," or, "This is the time frame we need to do it in." So—

DC: Did your family have big reunions, or were there other kinds of community events that taught you how to organize these kinds of complicated—

KB: We did. I think family reunions, funerals, just the gathering times, for weddings, that sort of thing. Weddings have become *much* more complicated. It used to be, [00:15:00] you'd go into the church basement or to the support house for the church, and you'd have some butter mints. You'd have cake, you'd have some punch, and some peanuts . . . that'd be it. And then, everybody went home. Now it's a much bigger deal. Yesterday, Connie called and told me that, "Oh they got" —because there was an issue with the cake because someone's family's got an illness. And so all of a sudden, we need a new cake for this thing. And I'm suggesting, in my household, I'm like, "Oh my god, we're gonna have to make a wedding cake."

CG: [Laughs] And he did. He was like—I was like, "Well, you know, I want to say no, to baking the cake. You know, this is *the* wedding cake. I don't know that we can cook *the* wedding cake." He's like, "But we watched *Greatest British Cook Off!*" [KB laughs] and I'm like, "Hey, you know, if you want to take this on, I'll be right there with you. I'll wash dishes. I ain't got a problem."

DC: [laughs] You know all about how to put the *rods* in the cake because of *British Bake Off*?

KB: [laughing] Yeah, and then she basically calls, [00:16:00] [CG laughs] she sends a text message that, "Oh, we got the cake and we saved 120 dollars, we're not going to do the delivery and you're going to pick it up." [CG laughs] And *I* almost lost my *crap*. [laughing] I'm like, "I am not taking this cake from *Rocky Mount* up Route 40 to get it over to Fairy Stone for the wedding!" [CG giggles]

DC: Explain what that road is like.

KB: It is hairpin turns,

CG: [laughs] yeah—

KB: narrow—

CG: Bumpy. [laughs]

KB: Bumpy—and depending on when the last time the state gave it some love, it could be rather *rough*. I mean, there are signs that come to say “trucking, GPS routing not advised, trucks, no, stop! If you go past this point, you're on your own.” Um, and, it's rough! And I was like—I really thought that she had *done* that [committed him to driving the cake]. [both laugh]

CG: Well, because for my daughter's sixteenth birthday, *he* buys the cake and he buys this *real* pretty, three-tiered, you know, fondant cake, [00:17:00] you know, real nice. He gets down there to, right below our house, and he's a nervous wreck, he goes, "The cake slid, it's messed up one whole tier." He was just tore up. He's like, "*I'm* never doing that again, never ever, ever." So when we got the cake lined up and everything, and my daughter was calm and everything, I was

like, "All right, let's have fun with my brother now." So I said, "Hey, you get to *deliver* this." He's like, "I might have said some few choice words to you."

KB: Yes, I was basically, I'm like, "I will *pay* for the delivery in a *second*. I'm not taking this responsibility on." So ah—

DC: Do you have a tradition of practical joking?

KB: Just a little thing, little things like that to just, like, kind of get a rise out of someone.

DC: Well, since we are sort of transitioned into talking about food, tell me about what—and sort of following up on the idea of sort of big events—what was food like in your family, in your neighborhood? How important was it?

CG: Well, now I'm going to hand *that* one to Kenneth, because *he* is definitely the baker, the cook, and stuff like that. I *love* cooking [00:18:00] . . . if I *know* what I'm cooking. He's one that can go in there and go, "Oh, I got this, this and this and I can make *this* with it." Yeah, no, not me. Grandma was a great teacher for *him*. He has tried. He has *tried* to pass it on. I do pretty good. We have little cooking things with my kids every once in a while. We've done a Chinese day that we've cooked, I mean, *all day long* for Chinese. We've had the cake thing. Yeah. So we've *done* stuff like that, but he is definitely the cooker.

DC: So tell me about your grandma, what her name was, and—

KB: So, um, it's Marie Alderman Nolen. And basically, we grew up, our mobile home was right at the end of the driveway. And so, Grandpa Dalton Nolen and Marie were right at the top of the hill. And the sun rose and set with Grandma. There was [getting emotional, then laughs]—She's only been gone for fifty years. [00:19:00] Goodness gracious. Okay. Amazing woman. She

taught me how to read. So I was able to do basic reading before I went to kindergarten. I spent all the time with her. We would cook. I mean, I'm out there doing *simple* cooking tasks with her, but cooking with her.

DC: Like, what kinds of things did she have you do?

KB: Oh, potato salad, deviled eggs. We would make apple pies, and we'd make *two* apple pies. One we put raisins in because the rest of the family thought that was *disgusting*, and that prevented them from taking all of our pies and eating them all. Cause we were all—cause my Aunt Brenda [Barbour] and her family, and Mom, Dad—and everybody was *there*. And so, they would go through a pie in no time flat. And we're like, "You didn't leave anything for us!" So that was our secret weapon, was to put raisins in it. Um, but we would, she'd do, she'd can sauerkraut in a hot water bath outside. I remember running back in yelling, "Grandma!"—it was a piece of plywood over the top, and it was on fire. [00:20:00] And I was like, "Grandma, it's on fire!" and, you know, running around.

DC: Was it to keep the rain out?

KB: It was just to keep the heat into the water bath. And just—she was diabetic, so I didn't use a lot of salt in my cooking up until probably, five or six years ago. I just *never* had acquired a taste for salt.

CG: The first time I went to his house—well, not the first time I went to his house, but one of the first times I was there and was helping him cook and he was like, he actually put like a *handful* of salt in. And I was like, "What? What are you doing?" He goes, "Salt's good." [KB laughing] And I'm like, "Since when? Salt bad, bad!" [KB laughs] Because I never had salt. Salt makes me swell up and stuff. So *I* didn't. Now, my father, he sits [inaudible - 00:20:49], he will

sit there and *eat* the salt shaker. So he's always been with our family going, telling Mom, "Well, you need to cook with salt. You need to cook with salt." So *we* never did. So [00:21:00] seeing him [Kenneth] actually cooking with salt, I was like, "Is this real?"

KB: But yeah, so, I've learned everything really from Grandma. Cause Mom was a 1960s and early [19]70s home cook. And so she was taking the shortcuts, the things that were coming out of, you know, Pillsbury, I remember Chef Boyardee pizza boxes, which are *godawful* in retrospect. But at the *time*, that was the big *treat*. So, her cooking was, because she was raising two kids, both people working trying to put things together, um, I think at one point, she said, "You know, I remember a time when we didn't have two nickels to rub together." Um, and so, she didn't have time to *do* that home cooking. *I* learned from Grandma, who *had* that time— cause she was at home. She couldn't work because of the diabetes, which was much more . . . damning at that point. She'd even lost one foot and one leg. So [00:22:00] you know—

DC: Not easy access to insulin?

KB: Well, I mean, I could give her, when I was five, I could give her a shot with the old-school bottle, syringe, pulling it out and giving my grandma a shot in the stomach, when I was like *five*. So very different. And Connie was a little too young to get the full experience.

CG: Yeah, I remember Grandma very *little*? Cause I was only like two or three when she passed away?

DC: And she watched you while your parents were at work?

KB: Yeah. Yeah. I was just literally *always* there. I would visit *home*, [laughs] because, you know, I was like, I'm, you know, I wouldn't go out to movies. I wouldn't go out to restaurants or anything. If Mom and Dad were going, I'd be like, "I'll just stay with Grandma." There was no

other kids *around*. The closest, I think Belinda lived four miles away. The closest kid my age was four miles away from me. Not a lot of opportunities. So I was more comfortable with adults. And then, [00:23:00] when Connie come along, you know, it was either that or a puppy.

CG: I won. [laughs]

KB: But yeah, so there, we would have bigger family reunions at that point. No one would stop by the store and bring—

CG: Get something to eat.

KB: Get something—or bring a prepackaged kind of thing—that would be so horrible.

[lauhgs] You would be judged for decades? Um, so it was a different quality of cooking. You spent the time to make it right and you were proud. And only certain people made certain things because they were very good at it?

DC: Do you remember any of those specifics? What kinds of things on the table?

CG: Oh god, yes. [KB laughs] Fanny Turner, which was our babysitter for *years*, she had the best green beans. I mean, I am not green bean person. I will eat them now? But *still*, I have yet to find any that tastes like Fanny Turner's.

DC: Can you describe what they tasted like? [00:24:00]

KB: They were they were a flat green bean. So it was—

CG: It was an heirloom green bean.

KB: Yes, that was she raised.

CG: There was a dark bean on the inside.

KB: It was a dark browner bean, you pulled them at a certain time off the vines and then she would can them. And it was a combination of fatback and the cooking process....

CG: Lord, I don't know. [KB laughs] But it—they was *the* best, and I remember always telling Mama, "Well, that's not how Fanny makes them."

KB: Yes.

CG: And Mama tried. [KB laughs] Mama's like "Fanny, can you please tell us, you know, what did you do? The kids won't eat my green beans." [KB laughs] She's [Fanny's] like, "Well, all I do is put some fat in there!" But no, it just never worked.

DC: So these were green beans that she had canned, and then she would cook them up with fatback and salt—

CG: Or lard.

KB: She didn't, she'd just pour them out of the jars. It was her canning process and how she prepped them—like the most amazing. I can still taste them right now. It's been, you know, probably forty [00:25:00] years. And I have yet to have a green bean anywhere in the world that is anywhere close to that.

CG: Right. And she made the *really* big biscuits, too. [KB laughs in recognition] The cathead biscuits? I mean, you know, Elvis Presley wouldn't have nothing on these biscuits because I mean, they was—

KB: They were big.

DC: Like, six inches across?

KB: Yes. Not quite that big.

CG: No, they were saucer sized.

KB: Yeah, she did the cut-out method, and they were all—

CG: Perfectly smooth.

KB: You know, and so, especially when they were doing early morning, when they would go out hunting during deer season, when we'd come up there [to Fanny's], we'd come up really early because Mom had to be at work at, like, seven.

CG: Yeah.

KB: So they were feeding all the hunters in the family. And what a *spread* of food. So you know, getting to see her. *And* became— her fried potatoes.

CG: Yes. [sighs] The best fried potatoes.

KB: I know the secret now is just copious amounts of butter. [Laughter]

CG: But [00:26:00] at the time it was magic.

KB: They still—I have yet to have—

DC: Were they just like russets, or do you know what they were?

KB: They were just plain yellow potatoes. And she'd cook them up, and—she didn't rush her cooking. It was slow. They were tender, they were done. They were just *lightly* brown, but they were perfectly done. There was never one that wasn't perfect.

CG: No.

KB: So those are the kind of things that just stick with you. I mean, I consider myself a pretty good person that's in the kitchen. I can hold my own. I cannot *touch* her cooking. I cannot touch my grandmother's cooking.

DC: And so this is Fanny, we were just talking about Fanny. What else would be on this spread for the hunters?

KB: Oh, for that, well, you'd have biscuits, you'd have gravy, eggs, you had honey—

CG: And apple butter, of course.

KB: Apple butter. You would have fried apples. You would have probably some country ham. And she wasn't [00:27:00] a big grits person. We didn't have a lot of grits growing up, but Lord, the gravy. Best gravy. Now, my dad.

CG: Yes.

KB: When he would get up on a Saturday morning (and I know I say *Saturday* funny), but if— about 5:30 in the morning, he would be up and he'd start making breakfast—because he would get up at about that time in the morning—and if my Uncle Jimmy would come in and start yelling and carrying on at 5:30 in the morning, "You all get it up! you all get up,"

CG: "Time to get up!"

KB: But Dad has put out this *spread*. And it's all those things: It's biscuits. It's gravy. And you can tell, immediately, as soon as you look at the bowl, who made the gravy. It wasn't Mom. Hers is runny. Dad's is thick and luscious.

CG: Yes. [KB laughs]

DC: And what was his secret? Do you know what his method was?

CG: He's—Once again, *time*. He don't *rush* it. One thing about females is, we have a tendency to rush. We like *high* [heat]. You know, who's gonna cook it down on medium when I can cook [00:28:00] it on high and be done a lot quicker? So Daddy was always this, low and slow. My husband, is following in his footsteps. I don't *cook* breakfast. If I start cooking breakfast, my husband's over there, he goes, "I got this."

KB: [laughs] Yeah, *please*.

CG: And I'm like, "but my gravy is better than his is." But we won't tell him that.

DC: Just like bacon gravy? Is that, or—

KB: It's usually sausage

CG: Sausage, yeah. So but yeah, Dad was always the breakfast—

KB: Slow, making that gravy and stuff. And Uncle Jim would—

CG: Biscuits.

KB: He'd make biscuits, and it had to be Virginia's Best flour, and—very sad that that place is going out of business.

CG: Yeah.

KB: And he would make eggs. And they were slow, he would sneak up on that egg to get it just right. He took scrambled eggs and I'm like—there are, like, a dozen of us, or maybe probably fifteen kids up at Grandpa Belcher's, and we're all like, "Please, scramble the eggs. We're hungry. [00:29:00] We need to get out and go play in the barn and run around and stuff."

DC: And he was going slow.

KB: Slow. And that's the way. But Grandma [Beadie Hylton] *Belcher* cooked on a wood stove. And it was a pretty, very—I'd say I'm most Appalachian on our Belcher side? And the Nolen side is a little bit, you know, they're a little bit more of the town grouping, even though they're from Shooting Creek and moonshiners—It's still, she, I never saw her cook on the electric range they had. Middle of summer, she was cooking on the woodstove. And so I think that he learned that pace of cooking. She was, she made her food a little different. She loved a lot of the Appalachian traditional things that you would see in a *Foxfire* book.

DC: Like?

KB: Souse meat, basically, every part of the pig you can think of.

CG: Liver pudding.

KB: Liver pudding. [00:30:00]

CG: Because Daddy wanted some liver pudding, and I started looking at it, I was like, "Yeah, no. I'm not cooking that for you. I can't do it. No."

KB: I mean, at one point, I remember Mom saying that Dad brought home a groundhog to cook. And he says, "yeah, well Mama would . . ." She said, "Well, you can take that to your mama to *make*. We're not bringing that stinking groundhog in this house."

DC: How would they make souse, or liver pudding? What was the difference between the two?

CG: Well, Dad, his health went downhill not too long ago. He's doing great. Having a great-grandkid has done *wonders*. And I like picking on him, telling him that's what made the difference. Mama has done awesome with Dad's health. He's been diabetic since I was born.

KB: Since he was forty.

CG: Yeah. Um, so you know, we've had diabetes on both sides of our family. So that has adjusted how we've cooked, too. But Mama's done *really* good with Dad. So when he went down this last time, his iron got really low. So of course, looking at diabetes, [00:31:00] and potassium, and everything else, what helps one, hurts the other one. So one of the things was, was getting him some *liver* to get his levels up. And he's like, "Well, I really like liver pudding." I was like, "Okay . . ." So I looked, and it's like sausage, and liver, and something else. And I'm like, "Dad, this is a heart attack just waiting to happen." I was like, "I can't do this." I was like, "We'll just keep on frying the liver, it'll be all right." [laughing]

KB: He's seventy-eight. If he wants some liver pudding, he can have it.

CG: Yeah, but I don't know that I could cook it. I can't do it [dislikes doing it].

KB: But basically, when we would kill hogs and stuff, she would basically take all the different parts to make, you know, souse meat and stuff is much more kind of a chunky, gelatinous thing. It's more you know, the head cheese kind of thing. And that's, um, very different from, you know, your sausage pieces, and liver pudding, and just, you kind of look at it and it's like scrapple in a way, and you're like, "Okay." [00:32:00] Spam is just a really smoothed-out version of all this. And it's okay. And now—I think if Grandma would make it, I would be like, "Okay, we're gonna try this out. This is gonna be fine." But when you're, you know, five years old, and you just killed that pig that previous day, you're like, "Okay. I'm not sure about this."

DC: A little too close to it all. [laughing]

KB: A little too close. I mean, it's weird, because, I mean, I've had turtle, frog, rabbit, squirrel, deer. You know—and then I got *really* crazy and went to France in college and had escargot, and

I'm like, you know, I think back, I'm like, "I've had all this other stuff. What's a snail? It's gonna be okay."

DC: You draw the line at groundhog.

KB: I have not had groundhog. And I don't think I ever will. Because, you know—

CG: I've had pig's feet and buffalo tongue. Buffalo tongue is interesting. It's like Spam. It tastes like fried Spam. The pig's feet, [00:33:00] though, was actually from my husband's grandma. He had told her, her name was Osie Goode. Of course, she's from Woolwine, too. So when we was dating, she called him up, she goes, "Hey, I got some pigs over here. You said you wanted to try it." So we go over there and we see her, and sure enough, she's got pig's feet. We take it back over to the house. Thank *God*, we took it back over to the house, to his house. And we were sitting there, and he takes his pig foot, and he just like *shreds* everything. And right in the center is that little bitty piece of meat. So we got that little piece of meat, he took a little wee bite, I took a little wee bite. I was like, "Well, that's not bad. You know? That's a whole lot for that little bitty piece. . . ." "No, you're supposed to eat all the fat." And I was like, "Yeah, no." We threw all that away. So she's like, "Well, what'd you think about it?" He goes, "Well, you know, the *meat* was good, but there wasn't that much to it." She says, "No." She goes, "You're supposed to eat all the fat." And then we was like, "Yeah, no." So we couldn't do that.

KB: I think one thing you probably need to know is our family arrived in the area around 1750. Our homeplace [00:34:00] is probably about five miles from where the original Nolen part of the family *settled*. The Belcher side, I'm probably guessing somewhere between 1710 and 1750, arrived, and we have a mountain named after us in the area. So—

DC: Where did they come from?

KB: Originally from England, and Scotland, and Ireland.

DC: Through Pennsylvania and then down? Or did they come straight over?

KB: No, we came straight across. The Belchers came across Virginia as far as I can tell. And stopped along the way. The Nolens pretty much just came to the first part that looked like Scotland and Ireland, and stopped. And you can just, if you look at like 23andme or ancestry.com, you just see us, we are Central Appalachian Irish and Scottish settlers and ah, we don't move much. [CB laughs] So you know, me coming to Blacksburg is like, [00:35:00] I went two hills over. I'm in the big leagues, now. [CB chuckles] But I think, you know, that kind of culture, it's just coming to [Virginia] Tech and actually experiencing classes on Appalachian Studies and going, "Oh, okay."

CG: "I can see that."

KB: "I understand why I do that now." And it's really weird that, you know, I'm two counties over and further into, really, the mountains than I was originally. But I think I'm more Appalachian from being in Patrick County than in Montgomery County, which of course, never joined the Appalachian Regional Commission anyway [originally]. The things you learn as you look backwards. But yes, as far as the food things, we—food is what you do. If someone is coming to my house, or coming to an event, the worst thing that could ever happen is for someone to go away hungry, unhappy, or unsatisfied. It is a badge of honor to have [00:36:00] some leftovers, and to send them home with them, or to have people ask for the recipe, or "How did you do that?" Um, I would absolutely *freak out* if I ran out. That's my biggest concern about this wedding coming up is like, How much do I need? And trying to figure out portion sizes, how can we get it all done? That's a panic part for me. And I think that is—I have never been to a

family event, or a funeral, or anything where there wasn't such an . . . overabundance. It's how you show love? It's how you show care—whether you know the person really well or not, you know, bringing the dish and having your name on the bottom of it with a marker and a piece of masking tape. . . . And people know which dish is yours, often by you're known for the dish you bring—

CG: [00:37:00] And the taste.

KB: Yeah. And sometimes you look and go, "Avoid *that* one." Some of the newer cooks, it's like, "Maybe you should stay with what you know, don't experiment."

CG: We've helped with many events and stuff, like you said, like, you know, for Easter, it's at Kenneth's house. Thanksgiving's at Mom and Dad's. Christmas is at my house. You know, so we've always kind of like, rotated around so, it's not on one person each time. But of course, each time, when we go, we always, you know, take something else. You know, mine's usually corn casserole (if it don't end up in the bottom of the oven). You know, deviled eggs for Kenneth (if they don't end up in the back of the car). Stuff like that. So—

DC: I like that your stories have both food successes and like, food disasters, right?

KB: Oh, occasionally things happen. There was a *cake* we made back in the [19]70s [CB laughs] that was so bad that Mom threw it out [00:38:00] and the *dog* wouldn't eat it. It was *horrible*.

CG: It really was.

KB: We still remember that *one* cake that was horrible.

DC: Did you forget to put something in it? Or put too much salt?

KB: I don't know what happened? It was, you know, we didn't use good old Duncan Hines or something! And um, it was just a scratch cake, and it fell. I don't know what happened, but it was *bad*. And so, you know, we have this—my Aunt Brenda made some

CG: copper pennies

KB: some copper pennies, which is carrots and—and they were godawful? And we still, that was probably twenty years ago—

CG: No, it was before *kids*.

KB: Oh, okay. It was probably thirty years ago. And we still refer to those copper pennies every Thanksgiving.

CG: Just cause we like to give her grief, but

DC: My family gives me grief about, I once substituted, instead of putting taco seasoning in ground beef, one time I put in like half a cup of nutmeg.

KB: Whoo!

DC: Yeah. So I understand, kind of,

CG: [laughing]

DC: how [00:39:00] those stories stay in rotation.

KB: Okay, here's one on me. Grandma Nolen had a Jell-O salad recipe. So Jell-O

CG: Oh my god

KB: with fruit salad, and then there's a cream cheese, layer—

CG: Yes, cream cheese with coconut. Oh my God, it's wonderful. I can just take the top part and forget about the Jell-O stuff. But the top part is *my* favorite.

KB: Yeah. Well, *I* made it and I used some flavored marshmallows because that's what I'd picked up off the shelf and I'd done some other things, and

CG: So we get there— this is for Easter. So we get there, and Kenneth's like, "This is Grandma's Jell-O salad recipe. I followed the directions *to a T!*" I'm like, okay. So I get into it. At first, I'm like, "Why's the marshmallow green?" He goes, "Well, I had to use flavored marshmallows."

KB: Because I didn't have the other.

CG: "Because I didn't have the other ones." I was like, "Well, okay, so you followed it to a T." And then it was the Jell-O was a different flavor.

KB: Yeah, it was raspberry, it wasn't strawberry like it's supposed to be.

CG: Yeah. I'm like, "So once again, we're still following it to a T." [00:40:00] And I'm like, "Wait a minute, the coconut's toasted." "Well, I thought coconut toasted would be better." I'm like, "So none of this." I'm like, "How can it be to a T if you changed three different things?" And it didn't have bananas in it.

KB: Oh, I was out of bananas.

CG: Yeah, so, you know, it was all of this—

KB: It was during COVID times. There was no bananas.

CG: [laughing] So you know, it's one of those. But to let you know, everybody's *so* looking forward to this wedding, because they *know* we are cooking it. I had one of my friends, she came up for [daughter] Anna [Goode]'s gender reveal, you know, we'd done this spread, and for the

baby shower, we'd done this spread of food. Kenneth's like, "Well, you know, it's a shower. We have to have cucumber sandwiches." I'm like, "Well, you make the cucumber sandwiches, I'll do the chicken salad sandwiches." And you know, and we had a nice spread. I mean, we're *known* for what we do. And so, one of the girls was like, "You know, hey, I wish I had went ahead and got you all to do my, my parents fiftieth anniversary," and stuff like that. I was like, "Well, you should have said something to us." But she's like, "So [00:41:00] you all are doing the wedding, right?" We was like, "Yes." She goes, "I can't wait." So people know. They know what they're gonna get. They know that they're not gonna go away hungry.

KB: But I had five times too many cucumber sandwiches because my fear was that someone might not get a sandwich. [Laughter]

DC: So tell me, how did you learn your strategies for scaling things up for cooking for a crowd? Is that something that your grandma taught you, or have you worked it out?

KB: It would have been very individualistic at that point. Mine is more from being here at the university and helping out with events, and kind of that logistical piece that I learned as a student running student events on campus, and then training students of like, "Okay, how are you going to hold this event? What are you gonna do?" I picked up, you know, a few things from being—housing and dining services are closely related. But mostly YouTube and PBS cooking shows, growing up? Um, I'm usually on some cooking show on TV all the time. That's what we [he and his husband] do. And that may determine what we're having for dinner that night. And then, [00:42:00] it's just that logistical thinking of, I'm in the operations position, so, it's, "Okay, I'm gonna need this, I'm going to need this," so running out of bananas is stupid for somebody like me, but it was COVID.

CG: Sure, blame it on COVID. [Laughing]

KB: But then, you've had people in the community have run these events before us.

CG: Yeah.

KB: I mean, our niece— my niece is your daughter—they are seeing how it's run at this point, and it'll be their responsibility. I don't see Anna going very far [away]. I see, probably, Bethany probably will fly the coop somewhere and move at least two hills over [or] something. But they're seeing it.

CG: And they both are very active in it. They [00:43:00] both want it, you know? They want to continue the traditions, which is how *I* ended up getting involved in it. David, he became a fireman—which he used to, even before he was a firefighter—

DC: This is your husband?

CG: Yes. Before he became a firefighter, he still would go *up*, when he was a teenager, and they used to do the apple butter overnight, he would go up there and stir it, you know, because they didn't do the automatic stirrers like we do now. So they was actually up there overnight, stirring it, which was great for the teenage kids because, “Hey! we can go up there, be” you know, “unsupervised, hang out with the older guys.” You know. It was like a rite of passage.

KB: You'd get to stay out there, you probably had a beer or two, you probably had, maybe a bit of coffee lace [alcohol-laced coffee], and maybe a little shot of moonshine as like, you know, “It's just the guys hanging out, stirring the apple butter!” Yeah.

DC: Let's back up for just a second for those who haven't had the pleasure of being at the October [00:44:00] Festival or knowing about the way it's connected to the volunteer fire

department. Can we kind of start at the beginning with that event? And there's an apple butter component, there's also the apple pie component. So tell me, like, what the festival is, what it's for, and how you were involved, and then we can kind of—

CG: So, what all started is, the um, Woolwine Volunteer Fire Department is all volunteers. Most all the fire and EMS in Patrick County is all volunteer based. We do have one, um, the county has one paid fire EMS. They don't have an actual fire truck or anything? They just help the volunteers? And then, we have another station, three members, some of those are paid. But pretty much everybody else within the county is all volunteer, so, of course, volunteers means you have to raise your own money. So, I think the fire department has been there for a little bit over forty [00:45:00] years? And so, you know, they maintain off of, you know, donations from, you know, people that have passed away in the community. The county pays for some, and of course, our grants and all. Our biggest fundraiser of the year is the October Festival. And it actually was formed by the Ladies Auxiliary, I think, twenty-five or twenty-seven years ago, something like that. So it started out being the festival of the day. So they started out, I think, with like four kettles of apple butter. So they would peel em, stir them overnight, and then, that Saturday, they would have a festival. They would have music, usually bluegrass music, have vendors, and serve food, and the apple pies, and everything like that. So it's just progressively gotten *bigger*. Now the crowd for the October Festival itself has declined over the years, because, let's face it, the younger ones don't really care about bluegrass music, ah, the older generation is, you know, passing away. [00:46:00] We still want to *keep* it going because it is part of our traditions. That's, like I said, one of the biggest reasons why *I* got involved, um, not only to support my husband, and our community, but to keep the tradition alive. The Ladies Auxiliary, a lot the ladies that *cook* the pies are not even *members* of the Auxiliary, they're just members of the community,

they come out to help support. And it's great to *learn* from them. I remember making fried apple pies with Mom and Dad. You know, we'd cut the apples, stick them out on the little screens and let them sit out in the sun and dry, and we'd eat, I mean, you've fixed four things of screens, and you know, it takes a month or so to dry them out in the sun—

DC: These are window screens, or like door screens?

CG: Yeah, those big window screens. And then you know, everyday you'd [00:47:00] have to go out there and either turn them—and when you turned them, you know you had to test one, or two, or five. [laughs] And so, you know, you ended up with less than what you had, and then Mama would cook them down and Daddy would fry them. And we always just done canned biscuit dough.

KB: Again, that's Mom taking the short cut.

CG: Yeah, instead of making actual biscuits.

DC: So this would have been in the mid [19]70s?

CG: This was just in our kitchen.

KB: Pretty much all the [19]70s.

CG: So Daddy always, Daddy was over the frying, so he didn't burn them because he was low and slow. So, you know, nice golden-brown.

DC: On a skillet on the stove?

CG: Yep, a cast-iron skillet, on the stove. And then, so when I went out there [to the members of the Ladies Auxiliary] to be taught—because like I said, a lot of our older ones are not able to now and uh, we're losing the traditions. We're losing the knowledge. So I was like, “Well, you

know, hey, work is really good for me, they'll let me off when I need to be off, you know, so they can work around. I always take vacation. I got my phone with me. I got my laptop with me. [00:48:00] 'If you need me, give me a shout. I'll jump online, do what I've got to do.'" But they're [her employers are] really good to let me do it. So I went up there [to "the cottage," where the pies are made], and it was an eye opener. You know, I had Bertha Conner, you know, Tibby Martin, Linda— I mean, Ms. Betty Perry, I wanted to call her— Ms. Harmon, all of them. And so, I got to hear the *old* stories, and the *old* tales. We had Esther, Esther Joyce, I think is her last name? she was the one that made the dough for *years*. And I mean, *years*. She was up there making the dough, handmade all the dough for us. You know, so it was great to hear all the history in it. And now I've been the longest one up there that's been out there continuously for the past few years. And my kids, [00:49:00] you know, Anna's been there when she can, you know, when she was in school, she wasn't able to. Bethany actually got to come; you missed her [on October 6]. She actually got to come. She got out of school early that day, because it was her birthday. And uh, so, she got out of school when they was having an assembly. So she's like, "I want to come and help you." So she got to come and help us. So, uh, the knowledge—

DC: And how old were you when you started making pies with other people? And then, when did you actually kind of take it over as the organizer?

CG: Oh, Lord, I don't know.

KB: [laughs]

CG: I wanna say probably ten to fifteen years ago, is probably when I started helping them, being more involved.

DC: So it's not like something you did when you were a child.

CG: No.

DC: You were just making pies at home with your family.

CG: Yeah. And then I'd say pretty much right after that is when I pretty much took it over.

KB: [00:50:00] It's this generation's turn to run it because, you know, the old ladies took care of it. And, you know, for a *guy* to be in that space and cooking, that just wasn't *done*.

CG: But they love it when Kenneth comes, now. They're like, "Your brother's coming?" It's like "Yes!"

DC: There were several men who were there this year, when I went.

CG: Oh, yes,

KB: That is a *very different* experience than you would have seen, maybe a decade ago.

DC: Okay, so tell me a little bit about— so I was there on Wednesday morning when we were peeling all the apples, and coring them, and putting them in the gigantic garbage cans, right, and getting the apple butter set up. How does— we could talk about *that* a little bit, like how it turns into apple butter, and then, move into the pies more specifically.

CG: The apple butter, we peeled 196 bushels of apples.

DC: This year?

CG: This year.

DC: Oh, I thought it was only gonna be 180.

CG: Yeah. Well, we only tell people about the 180. [laughter] [00:51:00] There was a few more that was donated in and stuff. So I think, and if I'm right, it was 196, I think is what the final total

was I heard. But so, each one of those has got to be peeled. Luckily, we have had enough volunteers and supporters and stuff that have the old-timey apple peelers. Well, I call them old-timey, I think they timed somebody one time, and I think within eleven minutes, they can peel and core a bushel of apples—one person, as long as somebody's there just to, like, feed it through. But there again, that's just *one* aspect of coring it and cutting out the outside.

DC: And these are the big, black cast-iron, hand cranked, that are attached to—

KB: Yeah, from like 1920s.

DC: Yeah, attached to benches.

CG: Yeah.

KB: And they have to be dialed in [calibrated]. They're cared for.

CG: They're loved. They're old. They are babied. Once you get yours, that's the [00:52:00] one that you stay with, you know.

DC: I got to do—they were [the mechanism was] so smooth. I was so impressed with kind of the mechanical care that had been taken.

KB: They are *loved* items. And they are—I mean, they're irreplaceable when it comes to that. So then we got to basically, at that point, they cut out all the bad spots, make sure we got all the peelings out,

CG: all the core out

KB: make sure we haven't missed all the seeds, because you never want to see a seed in your final product.

CG: But then again, there is seeds in our final product and it just means it's homemade, so.

[laughter]

DC: All the peelings go out, people use them to attract deer, is that? or compost?

CG: Well, they'll take it out, feed the deers, feed the hogs, you know.

KB: Not attracting them. Baiting deer is illegal.

CG: Yeah, so you're just feeding them. [laughter]

DC: Yeah, food for the deers

CG: Yes, food for the deers. And like I said, goats, and a lot of people use them for the pigs and stuff. So it's no use in letting it go to *waste*, you know, throwing them out in woods, you know, at least take them to *an area*. [laughter] So once all that's done, [00:53:00] it kind of just sits off to the side because, you know, on Thursday morning, so we peel on Wednesday and do all that, Thursday morning's when they actually start the apple butter. They usually start at four o'clock in the morning and they have a food-grade processor, it's a huge grinder.

KB: It's a woodchipper for apples.

CG: Yeah, is the easy way to put it. Anyway, they put it in there kind of to chop them up, and then they go in there [the kettles], and they just start. And they'll cook for twelve to fourteen hours.

DC: And there's quite an elaborate set up in what used to be the old firehouse, right?

CG: Yeah. It's all propane, now. We did—you know, originally they *done* the wood fire up underneath it and stuff, and it's just harder to regulate. And of course we wanted it moved *inside* because of the weather. So you kind of can't have a open fire underneath, you know, with wood.

So they've switched to propane. And due to the, ah, downfall of volunteers, [00:54:00] you know, I can't stay up all night two, three nights in a row now, and after one night, you don't *want* me to stay up any more than that. So, they've got the automatic stirrers. So once you get them all set up and stuff, then it's just sitting there watching it. But you still have to have somebody to maintain them, to go through, to *get* the seeds out.

KB: These people can see a seed at twenty paces. It's amazing. [laughter] But yeah, you've got to control the temperature, because that stuff is liquid magma.

CG: Nitrogen.

KB: It is just—my sister knows because she basically has burned her hand really bad the last year.

CG: I did. It was—I'm amazed, I burned my hand on, making hard candy, and I still have the scar for that. But I actually, it was the *first* dip out of the next-to-last kettle, not in 2020, but in 2021. And when I went to pour into the jar, you know, we have a funnel on it, and it hit the funnel just right and it went over, my hand. And I just kind of handed the pot over to the, my [00:55:00] future son-in-law, and luckily, there was a little girl there, Mae-Mae?

KB: Mae-Mae. [laughs]

CG: And she is as sweet as she can be. And that is probably the only reason why I did not cuss, scream, or cry bloody murder.

KB: How she held it together?

CG: I just kind of looked over, and my best friend that works with me at the plant, Sam, she was standing there, she goes, "Oh my God," and she just took the towel and wrapped around my hand

and pulled down [to get the apple butter off]. Well, when she did, of course, the skin pulled off, because it was, you know, blistered. And I just kind of, you know, handed it off, she's like, "Go get water." So I went over and we had a big bucket that we had had drinks in, so I just stuck my hand down in that, you know, it mean it was *cold* water. And my EMT friend was there, she came right over, she goes, "All right, this is what we're gonna do." She cleaned it up, we, you know, took care of it. You know, my chief, Bennett Shuff, he was standing [00:56:00] there, and a little bit later on, he finally looks over and he goes, "What are you doing?" You know, because here I am sitting here, my hand in this bucket, and he's like, he looks over, and they're like, "She burned her hand." And he was like, "What?!" I mean, he didn't even know it. He was sitting there counting jars. He didn't even know that anything had happened.

KB: The line did not stop. Once you pull the heat and you have to switch over from the automatic stirring to the hand stirring so you don't scorch the product—

DC: This is before you're putting it in the jar?

KB: Before you put it in the jar—the line did not stop. It was, she pulled out, somebody filled in, and we kept rolling, because you've got a certain amount of time to get that pot empty and into the jars. And it's about thirty-three to thirty-five gallons per pot that you get. And that's an amazing amount of apples to go in to get down, 196 bushels to come down to twelve pots, which is probably about 1400 quarts, or so. Um, and that stuff is, [00:57:00] I mean, it's hot as can be. It was probably 400, 450 degrees when it hit. But we didn't stop, even though I'm, panicking there. [laughing]

CG: Yeah, he's panicking. And I'm like, "It's okay. Get the apple butter off [out of the kettles]. It's fine. I will be okay. Just get the apple butter off." I was worried about the apple butter. Yeah.

KB: So you know, so pulling that off, the twelve kettles, you do six kettles, because that's how many kettles we have, and how many you can fit in there.

DC: Two batches, six kettles each.

KB: So you've got to basically take the kettle, clean it up, get it back, and then fill it back up and start it again, because there's such a demand. There's a couple of churches that make apple butter, you know, for fundraisers for the church. And some people like Ross Harbour church's [product], some people like Sycamore Baptist's, and then—

CG: Woolwine Methodist.

KB: Woolwine Methodist. So different—you know, there's a different flavor. And I will say that, our director, [00:58:00] sorry, our assistant vice president here at the university, I brought him a jar, and he said, you know, he's probably been gifted five, six, seven jars over the years, and he's like [about those jars, breezily], "Oh, okay, it's okay. It's good." [With our apple butter] He's like, "I have cleaned this jar out already. This is some amazing stuff." Because of the way we cook it, we just use a cinnamon oil and sugar, and apples. That's it.

DC: I will attest to that. It is silky, and, tastes like, buttery, even though there's no [substantial amounts of] oil in it, right? It's very delicious.

KB: The buttery point, that's a *really* good way of describing it.

CG: I love the apple butter, you know, and it's funny, because a lot of them at the station will go, "I don't want to see apples," or "I don't want to see apple butter." Yeah, I'm fine. I can still eat my apple butter [after a week of preparing it]. Not a problem.

DC: And take me through how you fill the jars. So I actually saw a picture of you, Connie, that someone took and sent to me, [00:59:00] of you standing at the table. So there's a lot of people there, there's a lot of jars.

CG: So we have, once the heat comes off and they take out the auto mixer and they start hand stirring it, um, it's usually me and my husband. And it's really strange because he pours right-handed, I pour left-handed, even though I'm right-handed, I can, thanks to carpal tunnel, years ago I had to switch sides because my wrist couldn't take it. So we switched sides. And I've just stuck with my left side since then. After carpal tunnel, I don't have a problem, but I'm just a left-handed dipper. So we've both got two pots, and we both dip on each side. So I'll dip it, fill it up, and I'll slide it down to the next one [volunteer]. She takes the funnel out, puts it in an empty jar, and slides it back down, because we've got four funnels, so that way we can keep a little steady go. She wipes around the outside and gets any of my messes, because, you know, you have drips, goes to the next one, she wipes around the rim, she puts the lid on it, that's been you know, boiled, [01:00:00] and then the next one down, puts a ring on it, tightens it up, and it goes down into the box. And once they get a case, it goes by Chief, Chief marks it down and it goes back in there to the storage.

KB: And I think my favorite part is the little stick with a magnet on the end of it, to pick out the individual can tips, that's what we call them, lids, "can tips." I don't know why we call them can tips, but we do. And the little girl, Mae-Mae, she was so excited. That was her job, is to pick that one out and put it on. And she's learning. I mean, literally, I don't know how old she is, probably—

CG: I think she's in third grade, I think.

KB: Third grade.

CG: And it's great. She's, she asked me, she goes, "Can I become a Ladies Auxiliary member?" And I was like, "Why yes, ma'am, you may." And I say, "I do believe you might be the youngest one we've ever had," I said. So she is officially a Ladies Auxiliary member now, and she is *tickled*.

DC: [01:01:00] So you were saying that it used to be that the teenage boys would hang out overnight and stir things, and you know, have little sips on the side? How has it changed in terms of who participates now?

CG: Well, you know, since they don't do it by hand, now, a lot of people are just like, "Well, you know, they don't need the help." Well, we *always* need help. The thing of it is, when it's volunteer, you can't guarantee that you're going to have somebody. So when we started having to expand, that's the reason why we had to expand looking at the mechanical part of it. Dad, I know, he stopped by many times to go help, and he goes, "Well, there was twenty people there, there wasn't no use in me standing around." But he happened to pull in when the other *five* pulled in with, you know, it's kind of like—

DC: When shifts are changing.

CG: Right. Well, it's kind of like going to Walmart, you know, *nobody* will be in line until you get ready to go in line, and then you've got twenty people in front of you. Same thing there. Everybody shows up when everybody's there, nobody's there when, nobody's there. [01:02:00] Me and Chief has sat there before on a Friday, when the third shift goes home, and we're just sitting there watching it cook for the next, you know, six to seven hours. Two people can *do* it?

But if something was to happen, we would be in trouble. But me and him has sat there before, just me and him sitting there looking at each other and looking for seeds.

KB: There's an incredible brain drain and young person . . . problem in Patrick County? Much like a lot of Southwest Virginia communities, you basically—the jobs are not there. And so when you graduate, you have to go somewhere, or you have to take what jobs are available. And those are tenuous. I mean, is the plant going to close? Every day for probably fifty years of Mom's life, or maybe only forty years of her working life, the plant was going to close at any time. Um, and that's the same [now]. [01:03:00] Many plants have closed. And so, the manufacturing piece, the logging piece . . . really, it's not there. And if you don't have the young people, the population is not increasing. And you've got to go somewhere. I feel guilty not being at home. You know, I love—when I crest over the Blue Ridge Parkway and see—

DC: Tuggle's Gap.

KB: Tuggle's Gap, there is a *peace* that comes over me. And I'm just, down the mountain, down Route 8, zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom, and there I am.

CG: Now there's a peace with *him*, except with whoever's driving *with* him? and he's coming down that mountain going zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom. [Laughter]

KB: Yeah, it's, you know, it's like, “Hold on, we're going home.” But there's a lack of that entire section of young adult and, you know, from probably [ages] twenty-one [01:04:00] to maybe forty, there's not a lot of people. And if they *are* working there, they're probably not making a lot of money and they don't have the time to do the volunteerism. I'm amazed by Connie and David. I'm like, “When did we become public health for Woolwine? When do you all sit down?” And, you know, I know that if I was at home, I would be helping out.

CG: He would be right there helping us.

KB: And so, for me getting to come home for many years, the university, that period of time, I was up against the wall. I didn't have enough staff and I was trying to do my thing here at the university, so I never got to go home. And most recently with a change in job, I'm like, "You know what? I *can* go home and I'm *going* home." [01:05:00] So these are now considered holy high days for me, and I will change university processes [CG laughs] to make sure that I am, you know, and I've got that capability with my new role. I'm like, "No, we're not doing that this time. I've got to make apple butter."

DC: Do you think that making the apple butter and making the pies brings people back home?

CG: Yes, yes. Very much so. Like I said, my aunt, she wanted to go to the beach. And she was like, "Do you think Kenneth will take me?" I was like, "No." I was like, "That's October Festival weekend. Yeah, no. That's mine. Back off. No." Yeah, but you know, *Kenneth* comes home. We have a couple that is, I think they're actually from Florida. They've got a couple of different homes. Her work, she works overseas so she was over in *England* some. And what happened is, it's Debbie and Tripp, I cannot think of their last name, but they are *great*, they happened to be coming through *one year*, several years ago, in the middle of the [01:06:00] October Festival. They had the windows down. And when they drove through, they was like, "What's that?" Turned around, came back, have made friends with everybody. They know when they're coming *up*, they come up, they have people come to their camper, they go out and *eat*, they'll stay up here for like a *week*. They always, you know, make a donation. But it's just great seeing them and bringing them *in*. And it's brought other people *in*, from them. And they have took our apple butter all over the place. *Kevin* [Pridham] sent some apple butter over to—

KB: Scotland.

CG: Scotland, yeah. And it went to California. I mean, this apple butter has went everywhere. Everybody *loves* it.

KB: Yeah. I think, you know, Kevin, he's from Maryland, originally, and his dad was in the fire department in DC. And his grandfather's— [01:07:00] you know, all these, connections. And so he works for Thermo Fisher Scientific and, he basically wanted to come down. So he's changed *his* schedule, to come down and spend time, and I mean, he's like, you know, five foot six, or whatever he is.

CG: Yeah. He's our little mini-me.

KB: Yeah. Um, and one of the plans was, he wanted to take little jars of the apple butter and give it to all the members of his team that he had never *met*. And so he shows up with these twelve containers, and he'd put little pieces of fabric under the ring and the little name tags on them and everything. And people were like, you know, "What is this? What's going on? Why are you giving us gifts? We've just met you." And it went, I mean, to France, Scotland, up somewhere up north, New Hampshire or something, and just all over. And one of them's called back and said, "I'm just standing here with a spoon eating this right now."

CG: [laughs] So I mean, even though it might not bring [01:08:00] our family back, it brings our family back, but it brings other families back. The community of Woolwine used to be so tightly based, you know, because most everybody was kin. Yes, we still have a whole lot of kin people that live in Woolwine, but we've got a lot of new people that's moved in. They don't have that community involvement. Now, with that being said, we've had several to come up and help with the peeling and help with the fried pies and stuff. And they're like, "Y'all are not charging near

enough." You know, because we was charging two dollars a pie. This year, we went up to three dollars a pie. It hurt me to go up to *three* dollars a pie! But once again, it's a fundraiser and everything goes up, you have to. But the one last year, she was like, "You need to be charging five dollars a pie." And I'm like, "Well, I can't do that," you know.

KB: She must have said that at *least* thirty times.

CG: Yes. She really did. [laughter]

KB: And then, if you look into stores and stuff and what people are— but [01:09:00] it's not only about the fundraising part.

CG: It's about bringing the community.

KB: For me, it's the community coming together. I love going in there and sitting with 100, 110 people that just show up that are our older people of the community that I've seen forever, and just sitting—and I love seeing the younger ones kind of coming in because I'm like, please, these people are passing away. Y'all have gotta come in and do this. I wish I could say it'd be wonderful if you could just do it for cost for the community's sake, but we do need to make money for the fire department. But you don't want to gouge the prices. It was eight dollars a quart this year.

CG: Yeah, it's gonna go up next year.

KB: It's going to go up, yes, but because there was a donation that help offset that cost, but it's also something that people, you know, their families aren't *making* individual pots. One of my earliest memories of Grandma Belcher and Grandpa Belcher was the family coming together to

make a pot at the old homeplace up there. And they threw pennies, new pennies in [01:10:00] the bottom.

CG: Yep, new pennies in the bottom.

KB: And I was just fascinated by this.

CG: And you made sure you had the same amount of pennies as you started with when you got done. [laughter]

KB: Yeah, that's important.

DC: To keep from sticking?

CG: Yes.

KB: But it's also for luck. Yeah. And then, you know, that's what I was told, it's for luck. But now and I'm like, "Oh, it's also to keep it from sticking." But I just thought that was *insane* to do that. But that's one of the earliest memories I have is being up there, making apple butter. And you know, we only made one pot. And that was a big deal. But there was all food around it. It was Grandma cooking, and all the extra stuff.

CG: Yes. All the grandkids, we played.

KB: All the cousins.

CG: Cousins. [Playing] "There's No Bears Out Tonight" —we ran around at nighttime. I wouldn't let my kids do that for nothing in a million years, now.

KB: Because there's so many things you could run into and hit. I mean, tetanus everywhere! And barbed wire. [laughing] And chicken poop, [01:11:00] because the chickens ran around everywhere.

DC: And how many people do you think would be there for just making one pot, for your family?

KB: Probably at that point, we probably had thirty? Just all the kids and the cousins running around and playing in the barn.

CG: You don't have that anymore. I mean, I remember us making apple butter there. We made apple butter at our Uncle George's in Danville. I've helped my next-door neighbor, [also named] Connie Belcher, *them* do it. You know, we used to do it down at, I think it was Falling Branch or something one time, we went down there and helped my old boss make it. You know, but now the only place I make it is at the fire department.

DC: Why do you think that's shifted? I know that the orchards have contracted some.

KB: Orchards have contracted, you know, prices are going up. It's a lot of effort. People don't want to put in the time to do it. You know, Dad says, "I'm not making any more apple butter. I'll just go get some from Bama Butter." [01:12:00] And we're like, "It's not the same and you know it."

CG: And, of course, but he's also stubborn-minded. And it's, "Well, I can't go to sleep. I've gotta be up. I've got to be doing this. I got to stir this and stuff." And it's like, "No, Dad, you know, we can, too." But you know, he's always been the strong one in the family.

DC: So do you think he thinks it would be too much work for himself, because he'd have to do all the work.

CG: Because he would feel bad because he couldn't do as much as he had in the past.

KB: And it's also, the families, just, they've dispersed.

CG: Yeah, you don't have the reunions like you used to.

KB: Yeah, and there's just not—if you don't keep people in the community, as I said, you know, our family has been there since 1750. Connie and her daughters are still there. I've went away. And you know, I talked about moving back home, and you know, taking back to the home place and my husband went, “But [01:13:00] I love our place here.” And I'm like, "It's steep."

CG: It's very steep.[laughing]

KB: If we had better internet back home, I *might* consider making the drive to campus. But yeah, I think you just—the families aren't—your cousins don't live over the hill, you just aren't coming together as a family. So now this community aspect is taking over something that used to be done by individual families. And now, I feel responsible to go back and do what I should have been doing for *years*, but I let the university and my job keep me from doing it? Now nothing short of illness will keep me from being there. Because I just thought, I mean, making the pie dough, the *honor* of being able [laughing] to make the dough is big. You know, these are the ladies that did it forever and when I was like, *anointed* that I could do it, [01:14:00] I'm like [exclamation], it's a badge of *honor* to be able to come in there, and especially one of the first guys really, to really spend any time doing it, it is an *honor* to know that I'm “Dough Boy.”

CG: And that's what he's called, he's called Dough Boy. And then, we have [David] Midkiff that comes and goes, "I want a piece of the raw dough, please."

DC: So let's talk a little bit more about— and I know you have other things to do today. [all laughing] I really love this conversation.

KB: Hey, when you said we would talk and go on a tangent? [laughing]

CG: Yeah, talking is not a problem for us.

DC: Well, let's talk specifically about the pies. From start to finish, how do you organize that? And then we'll talk more about being Dough Boy, and that honor.

CG: So the pies, we usually make over 500 pies, fried apple pies. The most I think we've made is 790-some pies one year. We always sell out? I think within all the years I've done, [01:15:00] I think there was one year that they said we had a few pies left. But it was a washout, it was outside, it was miserable. It was just not good. That was just a bad year for it, all around. We ended up having apple butter leftover and everything else. But usually, probably about a month or two before, we have a lady by the name of Sarah Still. She has a commercial food dehydrator, and she has been gracious enough, she usually peels and dries our apples for us. We have purchased dried apples before, but usually, if she can do it, she'll do it for free. The apples we get from Wade's Orchard, which is where we get our apples for the apple butter.

DC: Right there in Woolwine.

CG: Yes, right there in Woolwine. So they'll put it on our tab so that way we can just pay for it all at once. So the only cost that we've *got* is for the actual apples. So she'll dry em, and she'll get them up there to the fire department for me. And I'll just let the ladies know, "Hey, I got dried

apples here, [01:16:00] come by and pick up what you want, what is still here as of *this* day, I will take home and fix." And sometimes I have apples to take home to fix, sometimes I don't, depends on how people's doing, sicknesses, you know, we got, like I said, a lot of the older ones that do it, if their husband or whatever is not doing well, you know, they don't take it home, which is fine. You know, I have enough time. And Mama's wonderful. She's out there at the end of my road. It's like, "Hey," and she goes, "I thought you was gonna bring me some apples to cook down." I was like, "Hey, I was actually able to cook them down myself this time." So we take them home, let em soak overnight, and then we'll cook them down the next day. And we add lots of sugar, and apple pie spice, and sometimes some cinnamon, sometimes some nutmeg, sometimes some clove, depends on who gets it. You *never* know exactly what you're going to get. So some of them's really sweet, and some of them's not. So once we get them back that morning, we'll put them in a big pot and mix them all together. So that way you've [01:17:00] got more of a consistent—and used to, we would have done that by batches. And a lot of people liked it, but they was like, "You know, well, I've got one pie that was really good and one pie that was a little bit worse." You know, so once we started mixing it [the batches of filling] together, the community went crazy. They was like, "This is great. This is wonderful," because it was more uniform all the way through. So, um, we just stir that up. And then we get the Dough Boy in there. [KB laughs] And for years, we've always used Virginia's Best flour. Like I said, going back to my Uncle Jimmy, he was the biggest, ah—

KB: Proponent.

CG: Yeah, of it. I mean, waking up at four o'clock in the morning going, "This is the way we make biscuits in the morning, with Virginia's Best." I mean, it was always I mean, literally, he would wake you up with the Virginia's Best flour. [laughter]

KB: He was like a walking commercial for them.

CG: He really *was*. So you know, we always use Virginia's Best flour. Well, this year, we had switched. That was a little bit of a learning curve. You know, flour's [01:18:00] flour. No, it's not. There is a difference.

DC: What did you use instead?

KB: Southern Biscuit?

CG: Yeah.

KB: Yeah. And it was fine.

CG: It done good. It was fine. It wasn't Virginia's Best. And the whole time I was frying, my Uncle Jimmy passed away about three years ago, and the whole time I was sitting there going, "Uncle Jimmy would be ashamed."

KB: He would not be happy.

DC: What's different? I mean, do they use a specific kind of grain?

KB: It's just a local flour.

DC: Is there a self-rising agent?

KB: Yeah, there's self-rising. So this ah, we're using self-rising in all of these right now. But it's local. I don't know. It's just, it's got, you know, the protein content is just right. And it's just, you know, some people will love White Lily, because it's so soft and will create a really tender, you know, biscuit or [01:19:00] pie. But I think, um, you know, using Southern Biscuit, you have to

adjust how much shortening you put in it, how much water you put in it. And you know, it takes a couple of batches before you're like, "Okay, this'll work."

DC: How do you know when it's right?

CG: The feel! [laugh]

KB: The feel.

CG: That's what he always told me, "You'll know by the *feel!*" I'm like, "Yeah, that's the reason why I don't do the pies."

DC: Could you describe it at all? I know it's such a—

KB: So once you've got it mixed together, you kind of fold it a few times, and then you let it sit there and self-hydrate for just a little bit. So you've got to be ahead of the people that are rolling out. And the more people that are helping, the faster. You think, you know "Four cups of flour makes some dough, it's going to take a little bit of time to use!" Not when they're rolling really fast.

DC: So what are your proportions? You got four cups of flour.

KB: So it's about four cups of flour, about just under a cup of Crisco, or shortening, whatever kind we're using. And then I usually go at about three quarters of a cup of water. And then, [01:20:00] you know, there's some people do other mixes, but that's an economical mix, you're not putting butter in there, you're not putting in milk. So it's—

DC: You don't add any salt?

KB: It's already in the self-rising, because it's already got the baking powder in there and all that. So, basically, if we had to mix all that up, I'd go crazy. So basically you just wait. And you touch

it, and you just, there's a softness and a smoothness to it. And if you hand it over, and it's too wet, or it's too dry, they will *tell you*, and they will send it *back*, and you will mix it up with something else. Ah, I didn't have any rejects this year.

CG: No.

KB: So the first year—well, not the first year. The last year I did it, I did have one or two people send it back because it was just a little bit too wet at the time, because that consistency—but it's hand—now, Esther and them, she would just use a big mound and she'd [01:21:00] just add stuff in and was using a well method and just mixing it up that way.

CG: She could do that well. She could work that well like it was nobody's business.

KB: Maybe in twenty years, I'll be at that point. But you know, for production and getting it right—I do have a degree in physics and chemistry. So I may measure *occasionally*. [laughing]

CG: According to his husband, and Kevin, no, he does not. [laughing]

KB: But that's for me at home. When I'm out in a public, you know, I'm cooking— at this point, I'm washing my hands continually. And, you know, that kind of “serve safe” belief, and that's one of the things that's you know, we're sitting here making food without a restaurant license and everything else, and you're taking people's lives in your hands if you're not careful about what you're doing. So that responsibility for me is like, okay, wash your hands, follow the recipe, in a way, or at least close to it. As the day goes on, you get a little more sloppy. And then you get it over to them. So [01:22:00] but you've just gotta feel it.

DC: How are you chosen? And you said “anointed” right? [laughter] Was there a ceremony? How did you become the next to take on that role?

KB: They [The longtime dough makers] weren't gonna be able to be there. And Connie's like, "Can you come?" And I'm like, "Yes." And so, when I walk in, they go, "You're making the dough, right?" And I'm like, because I'd actually been trained by, basically, I was allowed to make three of the batches, and she's like, "Oh, that's good." And I was like [surprised], "Oh." And she's like, "Oh, you got it. You're good." And that was it. It was like, "Oh, I can make dough. Okay." It's not like I haven't made it a lot before, but once, ah, she couldn't be there. And so I just kind of stepped in. And it's kind of like when Connie burnt her hand: "We've got to go! Somebody step in and do it." And that responsibility is something that I can say, if nothing else, [01:23:00] you're taught responsibility and doing what you need to get done. And that's something that I wish I could take a bus down to Patrick County every morning and bring people there up to work here. I would have incredible employees. It's just that distance between the work and the source of labor, that I think is a quality group of people. And that was taught to me from Grandpa and Grandma, Great-Grandpa, the whole kit and caboodle. There's a job to be done.

CG: There's a job to be done, you do it and you do it right. If not, you will have to do it *again*. And again. And again. Like washing dishes, when they come *back*.

DC: I did find people very welcoming, as I, you know, came up to the table and they're like, "Here, you can roll out, here's some dough," and I was like, "Oh, okay. Fine." Is that an experience that is fairly normal in terms of bringing people in and showing them how to do it?

CG: Yes. [01:24:00] Woolwine is very, very welcoming. Yeah, we like new people. Now, we might tell you that "you're not from around here," or "you need to learn how to drive a little bit faster on the curvy roads!" But I mean, no, most of the time, we are very welcoming. Everybody likes to talk, likes to tell about *why* we're doing it.

KB: And what we're doing and tell the old stories. [To DC:] What you missed before you got there, everybody was singing, the country songs that were on the radio or whatever podcast we're listening to. And I was like, "Oh, well. Now that the *professor* is here, I guess no one's gonna be singing."

CG: No one's going to be singing, no. [laughing]

KB: But no, the only way you're going to learn, if somebody's standing there with a clipboard or you know, doing it, it's like, "No, get in here. We got stuff to do. Come on." And you'll have more fun doing it than standing there watching.

CG: Who was it that couldn't "fork"?

KB: Who was it who couldn't fork?

CG: Oh, that was Caroline. [laughing] All right, [01:25:00] So you know, of course, I had to think about it. So you know, we rolled out the dough. They roll them out. Of course, you know, you have certain ones that do the rolling, and we have certain sized saucers that you use because they work out the best. And they got the...

DC: How big are those?

CG: About that big. [laughing]

KB: Yeah, we're all kind of looking at our hands, now. Probably about— they're probably about five inches, I would say.

CG: And you know, you don't want them flat, but you don't want them concave, and you don't want— because you have to be able to flip the pie back out. So you know, you put a little bit of flour on your saucer, you roll out your dough and you stick it on there. Well, then it [the dough

on the saucer] goes to the next section, which is one that does the filling. So they you know, tablespoon or two tablespoon, probably like a tablespoon and a half.

KB: We were a little heavy-handed with the filling this year. Those pies were a little humungous.

CG: Them pies, they needed to go on a diet, but they was really *good*, so we're not going to complain about them. So once they put that in there, and then they fold it over in half, and then you take a fork, and you mash down, you crimp [01:26:00] the sides. Well, then, you have all this extra dough hanging off the sides. So what we've always done is, you *fork* it. So then you sit there and you hold your plate up, and you take the back of the fork and you just kind of like rake it around the side.

DC: Break off the edge.

CG: Raking off the side, right? She could not do that for nothing in her life. She had to sit there and pick it off with her *hands*? I'm like, "No, you just do it like this." And she's like, "I can't *fork* it." [laughing] And she just, I mean, we had so much fun. And she never did get it the whole time.

DC: She's the one who works for marketing for Walmart, right?

CG: Yes.

KB: Right.

CG: She just *could not* get it. And she goes, "I just, I have to do with my hands." And then of course, you take your fork and you put about three holes, three pokes in the top, for it to fry. And then once we do that, we just fry it until it's nice and golden brown.

KB: And we're using electric skillets for that, for the consistency of the temperature and because we don't have that many stoves. And I *will* say that we use like a Crisco or a lard, [01:27:00] it's not lard, it's just Crisco or shortening. If we were doing it at home? It would be a mixture of like a Crisco and butter for the better flavor. And butter Crisco doesn't count. [laughs] It just needs to be that mix. But again, trying to keep that going is very hard in a production environment, I guess you'd say.

DC: So I noticed that—you said that sometimes the electric, like the current will fluctuate?

CG: Yes, it will fluctuate. So sometimes it'll go down and you're like, "All right, come on, start getting, get back up." It depends on how many skillets we have.

DC: How many you have plugged in.

CG: How many we've got plugged in. And I guess...

KB: If the fans are running in the windows. [laughing]

CG: This time it was actually cool enough. We did not have the air conditioner on. Usually, we have the air conditioner on, all the windows open, a fan, and I'm sitting there going, "I'm dying." [01:28:00] But this time, it was actually very—temperature wise, I was not miserable.

KB: Yeah, I mean, that the old home ec building, it was, Lord knows when it was built.

CG: Yeah, I mean...

DC: This is all taking place inside the old home ec building, which is next to the old fire station, and across the street from the new fire station.

CG: Right, which is the old home ec building, which is, was part of the Woolwine High School, which is Woolwine Elementary School now. So my mom actually took home ec in that, what we call “the cottage,” at this time. And Ms. Harmon—

DC: It's a cinderblock building, right? There's some fairgrounds kinda next to it.

KB: Yeah, it's probably maybe 750 square feet kind of building. It's pretty *small*.

CG: But Ms. Harmon taught there. That's where she taught home ec.

KB: That's where I had speech class, because as a proper Appalachian, and I drop the endings of all my words? And so, I would go over to that little cottage and meet with the speech therapist in kindergarten and [01:29:00] first grade.

CG: I had speech class there because I could not do the Rs. Still have issues with the Rs at times.

KB: But it also, that table that we're using, it's lifted up on blocks. That table is probably from somewhere back in the 1940s or [19]50s.

DC: So a kitchen table, which is where we were all in very close quarters, right?

KB: An old school table.

CG: Oh, yes. It was all hugged up.

DC: Everybody was—

KB: Shoulder to shoulder, literally, possibly elbow to elbow, occasionally, bumping each other.

Yes.

CG: You get real nice and friendly.

DC: It was a very intimate and fun experience. And then, there was a whole, the other room, you know, to the right as you walk in the door, which is where there are long tables spread out with paper towels on them, right, in order to—

CG: Yeah, it was, we put down wax paper and then we put down paper towels to soak up the grease and stuff from when they dry and cool off before we wrap them up in saran wrap.

DC: And what makes a perfect pie, [01:30:00] do you think?

CG: Flaky crust.

KB: Yeah, flaky crust. It's got to have the right ratio of filling to the thickness of the pie, of the dough.

DC: And when you say “right,” do you mean—

KB: Just visually, and if you bite it, there's just a *right* way. It's like, you know, they're pretty heavily *filled* at this point for this past year.

CG: But the dough might have been a little bit thicker. Some of the dough was not as rolled as thin.

DC: Those are probably mine.

KB: Probably. [all laughing] No, there was a lot. I think there was a difference because we don't—this is our first year using Southern Biscuit flour and it's gonna react differently than the Virginia's Best. And I think it had a little bit more maybe leavening agents in it, and it got puffier. Still delicious, but again, not Virginia's Best. So I think— and it's about how you fried it, who fried it, if you, when did you change the oil? So you've got to make sure that you don't just keep it going and you change out the oil and wipe [01:31:00] out your pan occasionally,

especially when we did like the almost 800 pies that one time? I've never been so tired. It was a lot.

CG: Yeah, we dumped a *lot* of grease that day.

KB: Yeah. So I think we would probably—if we had a little more consistency on, you know, the portion control of the filling—but you know what? Then you might as well just be a company doing it. There's no question that this is a *handmade* fried apple pie. So we don't call them “hand pies,” they're “fried apple pies,” because we don't really create as many of the meat pies and different pies, it's just, it's a fried apple pie to us.

CG: People, same thing with the apple butter. People know that we're making fried apple pies. So the year that we had COVID and we did not have the festival, we still done the apple butter, we'd just done a one batch run, and we just done some apple pies. We still sold out of all the apple pies, and apple [01:32:00] butter without having a festival. Like I said, they *know*. So they know, Wednesday, we're peeling apples. Thursday, we're making pies. By Thursday afternoon, I have people coming by going, “Can we get pies now?” “Yeah. You can get pies now.” And we actually pulled *back* pies because we were afraid we were gonna run out of pies and not have none for the festival this year.

DC: How do you manage all the logistics of storing the pies, getting the money?

KB: You know, well, I hate to say this, but we could get robbed *blind* in about three seconds. Because there's just a bag of money, and we just know where it's *at* and you go throw the money in when somebody comes buying them. And I mean, whoever's, if it's Connie, if it's me, if it's anybody that's doing it, we'll grab that, count it up, throw it in there, and go on. And there's, you know, there's a trust factor for that. I mean, you could *almost* put a bucket out there and just say,

[01:33:00] "Throw some money in there," and it'd be okay. It's a . . . *different* group of people and a different set of expectations. You know, the most *exciting* time is making sure that all the orders are filled for the actual apple butter. The *pies* are, we might have 500, we might have 750, depends on how hard we scoop it and what we get done, ah, it's a natural product and it cooks down a little more: we'll get what we get. So you better get in line!

CG: Same thing with the apple butter. The past couple of years, we ended up and I hate this terminology, I hate doing it, but "pre-orders." So we know that we're gonna make twelve kettles. So we know out of a kettle, we get about thirty gallons. So we're gonna go, "Okay, after 200," I think we I think we said after 250 or 275 gallons, after I get that much sold, I'm not selling no [01:34:00] more, everything else is gonna go on a waitlist. So come that Saturday, well, that Friday night, once we got the last one off? We had—what we had said, we sold. So we had to go through and divide all that up and get it out. And then, we went to the waitlist. When we got done, we had three cases of apple butter left for Saturday morning at the festival. And people are like, "But I want . . ." and so, we're in that spot of, do we not sell it? I mean, that's what we're here for. We're here to sell it for a *fundraiser*. You don't want to make people mad, but you can't *wait*.

KB: It'd be kind of nice to have something at the actual festival. I mean, you're talking thirty-six quarts leftover out of 1400. And these things are still hot and still sealing [01:35:00] and popping, and we're trying to sort them out and say, "Okay, this firefighter sold and this is the ones that they're getting." And it's a—

CG: Tense.

KB: It's tense. And it's also, you know, I'll see people come up and talk to Connie and go, you know, "Can I get on the list for this?" And somehow she remembers to get everybody on the list, even though she didn't make the note at the moment, which gives me the—I want to build an app to actually take all [CG laughs]—if I could have all the firefighters agree that they would use the app?

CG: I use Google Docs! I mean, come on, now.

KB: Oh, God. [CG laughs] Yeah, but I mean, if one of the firefighters expands and sells that, then if somebody else is doing that, it's whoever gets first on the list to mark those down. And it gets tense. I mean, if people pull up and *cannot* get apple butter, they're very upset.

CG: Yeah.

KB: [laughs] And, you know, and that's hard to, you know... [01:36:00]

CG: It is, because you know, I mean, we're doing this for the community. We're doing this for the fire department, but we're doing it for the community, too. And these community people have *been* there. They've *been* the ones cutting the apples, *being* there stirring, *being* there helping us *do* all this. And some of them, you have to look at and go, "You know, you *know* to get on the list," you know, "You really need to let me know, before now, that you want some."

KB: It's one thing to come up say, "Oh, I need three more, because my cousin in North Carolina called and said if I could get some," but don't wait till the last minute, the day of. It's—we're probably not gonna have it. And, you know, if we'd hadn't had the 196 bushels, we, you could have been short—the waitlist, you just wouldn't have been able to fill it. Being able to fill all the waitlist and have a couple cases left over, I thought it was a masterful stroke of—

CG: Luck.

KB: Luck, exactly. [laughing] I was gonna say “planning,” I’m like, “No, that’s [01:37:00] a lie.”

CG: No, that’s a lie.

DC: Those copper pennies, though. [laughter]

CG: Yeah, well, you know, the church had planned on, and they’d done the same thing, pretty much same thing. They presold “so much.” Their kettles did not produce that much, even though they presold it. The apples this year, and this is something that happens every year, sometimes it will yield more apple butter, sometimes it don’t.

KB: It’s all about the moisture content of the apple.

DC: And you usually use Golden Delicious, right?

CG: Yes. Usually it’s Golden Delicious. There has been years in the past that the apple crop wasn’t great. So they’ve had to, you know, supplement with some other ones. But usually it’s Golden Delicious, is what we try to always get and always use. It’s the best.

DC: How do you imagine the future of the festival? What would you like to see? How might that happen?

CG: I *like* the festival? I love the festival. I love seeing the people come out. We’ve got some great music in [01:38:00] Woolwine, now. Jordan Morrison [and the Foothill Boys]—I can’t remember what the band’s called, what his band is, but he’s just a Woolwine boy, taught himself how to play and is doing a great job. And he’s, luckily, been there for the last two years. And since he is a Woolwine boy, he’s got a pretty good following. So you know, we’re getting people back out to the festival, which is great. Zeb [Ross], I can’t think of his last name, but he’s the big

flatfooter on TikTok now. *He* was at October Fest, dancing, in Woolwine, and then was at CMAs last week, you know. So it's getting out and that's great. I just hope that we get the younger population to come in, to *continue*, because in fire, [01:39:00] in rescue, in anything within the community, the volunteers is losing. You can't get people to work for a paycheck now, and you sure in the world can't get them to sit there and volunteer their time for nothing. And until they realize that seeing these family and friends and meeting these new people, that that's more of a paycheck than that monetary, you know, *money*, it's not gonna make a difference.

KB: We need more people. We need people either moving into the community and joining in—and not coming in to try to change it, but to come in and *join*? I'm concerned about, you know, COVID, there was a question of how people were going to react and come out and support things. We do *other* events throughout the year. You know, there's a truck raffle—[01:40:00]

CG: The Smith River Rescue Squad, they do a vehicle raffle. It originally started as a truck. With prices and everything else that went to a little Chevy Spark. And now, it's to a side-by-side utility vehicle. There's a waitlist for that. Luckily, our community has always supported us. And it's a 100-dollar donation ticket, and they get a meal.

KB: They get *two* meals!

CG: Yeah, two meals, two meals, and a chance to win this thing. So Kenneth comes down. He helps us cook for that. So we have a plate lunch that we serve. It's usually two meats—

KB: We did chicken, we did barbecue, we had green beans, mashed potatoes, rolls, and apples. Apples were so good. I think I just am [01:41:00] genetically inclined to like apples.

DC: [laughing] Fried apples?

KB: Well, there's fried apples and large things—so we use the elementary school, because, you know, a lot of places are like, "You can't come into the elementary school." The elementary school is part of the community. And so, we're down there basting all this chicken and getting into the combi ovens and doing all this stuff. And, you know, Kevin and I came down [from Christiansburg] and, you know, it's literally work for hours upon hours and hours, and then trying to get it all served into the containers and back across the street to feed everybody, and keeping it all temperature safe, *and* tasty—

CG: And quick.

KB: And quick, and going, "Oh my God, how much butter are you putting in that?" [CG laughs] But it's so *satisfying* and *fun*.

CG: You're tired. It's funny, you know, a lot of people call October Festival "Hell Week," because you literally, [01:42:00] you work your butt off. And Chief, and Midkiff, and my husband, David, you know, they'll work days before anybody else does. You know, they'll, you know, be cleaning up the station, cleaning the bathrooms, getting everything out. When we had it outside across the road, we had put up the fencing, and the tents, and the chairs, and the tables, and everything else. So you know, you're tired. But by the time that the week's over with, I'm like, "Oh my gosh," but it's like, "Okay, I'm ready." I'm *ready* for next year—I might be tired, my feet hurt, and my back hurts, but I'm ready.

KB: And at the end of the night, when you're striking everything down, so many people in the community stay and help take down the tents, and move everything around, the tables and chairs. And, um, it's a real—it's just heartwarming to see people not just disappear and say, "Oh, well, [01:43:00] you handle it." That is what the definition of that community is. And I think when

Kevin was talking to the people at Thermo Fisher, especially from France and Scotland, they're going, "What do you mean, volunteer fire department?" I'm like, "We volunteer to come to your place and put out your fire, and nobody's getting paid for this. And we need to sell apple butter to put out your fire."

CG: Pay for the gas. [laughing]

KB: And so, to us, it seems normal? But it's not normal across a lot of the world, and even the United States, to have that. And it's something special, I mean. And everybody at this, you know, anybody that's around me knows, these are the days. I'm gonna be gone [from work]. And it is a real treat, [01:44:00] if I come and I leave a jar of apple butter on your desk? You are one of my favorites. [CG laughs] Because, you know, I've had to wrestle that case of, you know, I had to get on the list. I might have worked on that piece, but if I didn't get on the list? There was no guarantee I was gonna get the apple butter. So I put my order in early because, yeah, and I would never—

CG: Which, by the way, June is the vehicle raffle, just saying.

KB: I'm not on the list to get a ticket. So you have to know someone to get a ticket for the raffle for the car, because—and you know 100 dollars for a ticket is a lot for a lot of the people that are pensioners, I guess? But these [the rescue squad] are the people that are going to come and get you and take you to the hospital counties away because we don't have a *hospital* right now.

CG: [01:45:00] So an average run time for a rescue call in my area is at least three hours. So by the time we get the call, get to the station, get to the person, take the person to the hospital, get back to the station, and make it back home, you're looking at about three hours.

DC: Because you cover the whole county, is that right?

CG: No, that's just for—we actually—Smith River covers the Woolwine and Fairy Stone area.

KB: But you have to go to New River—

CG: New River, or Martinsville or Mount Airy, is your three closest ones [hospitals].

KB: And assuming that they are taking patients and they're not backlogged at that point. So I mean, imagine getting up in the middle of the night, doing that, and then going to work the next day—to someone that might not have gotten—your boss that didn't some of that apple butter.

[Laughter]

DC: Do you feel like the [01:46:00] volunteer ethic that is created in these food events helps to sort of reinforce or encourage people to do the volunteering in the fire department or vice versa?

CG: I think so. Because one is, they see more of the volunteer aspect of what and all it takes. And that's what we've, you know, told a lot of people because they're like, "Well, I can't fight a fire. Well, I can't run a rescue call. I don't want to do this." You don't *have* to. You can volunteer to come out and work these fundraisers or, you know, we had Bull Mountain catch back on fire a couple of weeks ago. Luckily, it was contained. They said it was only like an acre and a half to two acres. Last time, that was a week-long fire. This time we got it out quickly, which was wonderful. But somebody had to be there, we had people that was great enough to bring by food, bring by water, you know, "Do you need anything?" That, I mean, we need volunteers to run and stuff. But we also need the support volunteers. You know, like Ken said, [01:47:00] we do the food for the vehicle raffle, we've done plate lunches at the October Festival. You know, so Wednesdays, apples, Thursdays, apple pies, Fridays, cleaning everything up, Saturday is a ham plate. So we fix ham plates and apples, you know, baked apples. And you know, so, you have to have the support for that, too.

DC: I had some delicious vegetable soup on the day that we were peeling.

CG: The vegetable soup? Yeah.

KB: And Crystal did that this year.

CG: Crystal had done the vegetable soup this year.

KB: Crystal Harris. She was really the founder of the rescue squad. And she ran the cafeteria when I was in elementary school.

CG: So she knew us both, and it was back when the cafeteria ladies was true-blue cafeteria ladies. It was the good—

KB: They were [01:48:00] cooking food.

CG: They were *cooking* food. It wasn't all the, you know, restrictions now. When Obama came in and changed all of the food regulations and stuff, the food—the amount of food that gets thrown away now at the schools is outrageous, because kids don't *eat* it. It's not *good*. They're worried about kids going hungry and needing food and stuff? *Let* these ladies go back to their ways. Ellen Hylton is now the cafeteria lady. Her mom was the first Ladies Auxiliary at the rescue squad and could cook. I mean, Ellen still cooks and cans out on the open fire. You know, let them go back to cooking. These kids will not be going home hungry. My daughter comes home every day starving. She's like, "I'm going by Walmart, [01:49:00] I'm going by Wendy's, I'm going by Hardee's," because the food in the cafeterias is not what it was when we was raised.

DC: Do they still have, like, cooking facilities there or is it more reheating types of...

KB: The facilities haven't went, but there's a lot of—

CG: Wheat. No seasonings. No salt.

KB: Yeah, just a lot of restrictions and it's a lot of reheating and a lot of products, because, you know, you're having to certify everything. So I feel for them, trying to—

DC: Less flexibility.

KB: Less flexibility, and not something that's, you know, regionally appropriate as well. So I think, yeah, it is sad seeing a lot of the waste there and what they're trying to do. But—and we don't have a lot of kids. When I went to school, we were the first class that doubled and had two first grades, two second grades, because there were so many of us. I think I had—

CG: You were Baby Boomer, though. [01:50:00]

KB: I was a late Baby Boomer. I think we were probably fifty-two or fifty-three students. And they're like, "Oh, my, what are we going to do with this?" And they expanded the schools at that point. And now we're back down. I'm like, "*How* many people are in this class?" Which scares me for the community for the future, and you asked about the future of this activity. Unless we increase the number of kids we're having, and there's something for them to do in the community and a reason to stay there, this kind of event cannot endure. It can be scaled back and can still *happen*, but it won't be the *same* if you don't replace the people that are passing on.

DC: Is there any kind of effort to recruit kids, specifically, or young people to these events?

CG: We have tried. [01:51:00] You know, of course, anytime we see anybody or, you know, we're on a wreck call or something like that, they're like, "Hey, what's going on?" I'm like, "Hey, we know, you can come out and join us." And of course, we still use a shark attack every once in a while. You know, somebody comes up on the wreck up on the mountain, "What happened?" "Shark attack." What else is gonna happen in the middle of the woods? [laughing] But we try to get them in. We've had several that younger ones that are like, "Oh, yeah, you know, I'll come

out." And some of them stay, some of them don't. There again, a 16-year-old boy. Yeah, that's all fine and great. "I've got a pager. What do you mean, you want me to get up in the middle of the night? I can't go out tonight?" You know, so it just kind of—it's nothing for them. Yeah.

KB: There's nothing. I mean, there's no movie theaters. There's not a lot of restaurants.

CG: You don't cruise. We used to cruise.

KB: Just ride around in a circle. [laughing]

CG: Ride around in a circle. But it was the greatest thing. I mean, you had your friends and you knew people that was on the rescue squad and stuff, [01:52:00] so, if they got a call, it's like, "Oh, hey, let's go with them." You know, it was something fun. Now, it's like, "Oh, wait a minute, I'll just sit here on my phone. It's just more fun."

KB: Wait for somebody to post the update. I really think, as much as I love the internet and wish the place had better internet, it's also the death of community, because you can just, you can click "like" on Facebook and you've done your part. No. You—I need you to come out here and help me carry this damn heavy kettle, [CG laughs] and clean it out, and scrape off the dried stuff where Connie's been sloppy when she's pouring stuff in. And I can tell which side of the bucket or the kettle is hers versus David's, um—

CG: It'll be all right.

KB: It's okay, we got a power washer. It's fine. [laughing]

CG: It's good, it's fine. It's all good. [laughing]

DC: This has been a great conversation. Is there anything that you want to add about, [01:53:00] either, like foodways in Patrick County—

CG: I'm sure at midnight tonight, I'll go, "Oh, hey, I should have told her this."

DC: Or about the meanings of this particular kind of public baking to you?

KB: For me, this brings me such a level of joy, to come back. And I feel like I've achieved the level where, personally, I've gotten my life together, I've done what I needed to do, I can come back and do this and enjoy the *hell* out of it? And I can see that, if I ever retire, even if I stay here [in Blacksburg], I can see myself going back and volunteering. You know, it's like, "Fine, I'll do *something*." I don't know if I want to crawl around in the fire and put the mask on and all that, um—I might, you know, drive the ambulance. I [01:54:00] love turning on the sirens.

CG: Yeah, you just like hitting the sirens.

KB: But I feel a responsibility to give back to the community that created me. So I'm excited about it, and I hope it continues on. I really want an app, [CG laughs] because I just see the stress.

CG: You can make an app. I'll be happy with an app, that's fine.

KB: I really—the sense of peace that you get, and I'm hoping that people will start coming back into these communities and engaging in these kinds of activities. It's just it—

DC: What gives you the most pleasure about like being in the home ec building when everybody else is there?

CG: The stories. Oh, my God.

KB: The stories.

CG: And it might be the same story you've heard ten times, it's just like Daddy telling the story. I *love* listening to the stories.

KB: And he tells more stories now than he did when we were little, [01:55:00] um, because they were so busy? and tired? And now, I'm starting to hear them, I'm like, "You all did what?"

CG: Yeah, "What was that story?"

KB: And so if you can get them on a tangent and talking, it's *fun*. And, you know, seeing, you know, Ms. Perry in a different light. I mean, I never had her as a teacher, but I worked with her on bringing back the yearbook for the elementary school. And she's like [now], "You worked on the first yearbook when we brought it back." And it's been, you know, *decades* and I come in, and she's like, "You did that." And I'm like, "okay, um" It's just the warmth you feel. People are genuine. And there's no *glory* in sitting there and rolling out pie dough and doing this stuff and breaking your back [01:56:00] and doing that kind of work. There's not glory in it. It's just good, honest work and people that are doing something *together*. And in the age that we live, I don't get to do that here at the university. I don't get to do that in my community. I'm friends with my neighbors, but we don't hang out.

DC: They can't tell you a story about when you were seven.

KB: Yeah, it's about going back home and being with people who are just good people. I consider the people of Patrick County, especially those in Woolwine, and Charity, and Fairy Stone, to be the kind of people that I *should* be? So going back home and doing this is giving back, in that area.

CG: Crystal Harris, like I said, she was the captain of Smith River for years, twenty-plus years, I think.

DC: Of the rescue squad?

CG: Yeah. [01:57:00] I took it over from her. She's actually taking it back over for me come January [2023].

KB: Really?

CG: Yes, I stepped down.

KB: Oh, wow. This is amazing.

CG: This is amazing. Hanes Brands is getting bought out by Apex. So we are going to be transitioning programs, computers, everything. So I told them, I said, "You all," I said, this year, my oldest graduated, she had a baby, she's getting married and everything else, I said, "I have not been able to dedicate as much time as I usually have." And I said, "And I know next year, I'm not going to be able to." So I stepped down and Crystal is going to take over for the first *six months* of the year until they can find somebody to replace me, i.e., she's gonna take it for *the year*, at least. But this has been her baby. And the whole time, you know, anytime we do any of the bakes, the dinners, whether it be for the community or within the squad itself, [01:58:00] she's always like, "Well, do this, do this, do this." She's very, you know, she likes to teach. Of course, she always liked telling us, she likes to dictate, too. It's like, "You do this, you do this, you do this."

KB: [laughing] Do not question Crystal.

CG: Do not question Crystal. So, she is great. But I always tell her one of these years, "I'm gonna grow up to be like you," you know. And that is because of what she has done in past. You know, she literally has put her life and her kids and stuff, you know, she would leave her kids and go run a rescue call. She is definitely very dedicated to the rescue squad, and for forty years, I think it was forty years, Smith River never refused a call, never turned over a call. We was able

to cover all the calls within our area. We never had to have mutual aid, unless we was already on two calls [01:59:00] and we didn't have another truck to run a third one. That happened one time, I think. But other than that, it had always been covered within our area. Well, the past, since I've took it over, we don't have—most of the calls is during the day, most everybody works during the day, so we can't run it. So we're having to turn over and everything else. So that really hurt, you know, going from 100 percent coverage to not so much now, we're turning them over. So she's had that dedication and all. And to have that dedication to a service, to a community service, I think was awesome. I will never have that dedication that she has because my family comes first, always has, always will. But it will be a close second to me.

DC: Well, I see [infant grandson] Carter outside the window there peeking in, so I think this is a good time and [02:00:00] it's a great sentiment to wrap up on it. Do you have your phone, please for just the thirty seconds of um—Thank you very much. I learned a lot from this. I hope to be down helping out this next year too.

CG: I hope so. We enjoy it.

DC: It was a fun experience for me. So thank you, and let's just record the room for thirty seconds.

[pause]

DC: All right, that is a wrap.

KB: Awesome.

DC: Thanks.

[End]